

Daughters of the Digital Empire

Book One of
Moonlight Hearts

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And Margaret Lovelace

Chapter 9: The Next Day

“Lady Ren. It is time to wake up.”

My eyes felt raw, and my throat was hoarse from crying. I risked opening my eyes and saw Amy closing the door behind her. She slid a cut red rose into a vase on my vanity. I smiled at that. I loved roses.

I struggled off the bed. Remembering yesterday, I realized that I was giving Amy quite the show. And it involved my panties and a sheer nightgown. I blushed. And when I met her gaze, she blushed as well.

Amy spoke again in a softer tone; “Ren, dear, did you sleep well? I know yesterday was rough.”

“Dear?” I asked

Amy shrugged, “I wanted to add something romantic. I was going to say dearest, but that felt a little much and a little premature.”

I put a hand to my cheek, “Yeah. It might be a little soon for that.”

I escaped the massive bed and took a moment to fix my panties. I assumed that male game designers chose panties for sex appeal rather than comfort. I shook my head. Although not a full thong, the panties I wore exposed much of my behind.

“Why did I wear these?” I asked the room.

“For my benefit?” Amy said with a smile. I looked at her with a start.

Amy blushed, and then stepped forward pressing herself against me. My breathing quickened. And she reached down and took a cheek in each hand. She leaned in and gave me a long deep kiss. One of us moaned. This time it was my legs that weakened. Amy tried to catch me, as I had done for her yesterday. But my new body was six feet tall. And Amy was five foot five. She struggled for a moment, and then I saw her smile. She put her hands on my shoulders and pushed me back on the bed. I landed on my back with arms spread. I slipped and my legs splayed outward. Amy stepped between my legs and leaned forward. We pressed together, bodies touching from hips to bosom. She bent her head down and breathed on my neck.

I cried out, and then smacked my hands over my mouth.

Amy moved her head and kissed and licked my exposed and naked shoulder. I shuddered and this time I knew that I was the one moaning. I couldn't stop myself. My breathing came ragged and heavy. Amy kissed from my shoulder down along my collarbone towards my breasts. I wanted to tear the nightgown from my body to give her what she wanted.

I couldn't think.

Amy pulled the puffy shoulder straps of my nightgown away from my body. She began to ease the nightgown down my body. She had reached my breastbone, and was about to expose me, when a knock came at the door.

Amy grimaced. She nodded to me and walked to the door. I pulled myself up and straightened my nightgown, still flushed and aroused. I struggled to control my breathing and failed. I could still feel her breath on my neck.

Amy opened the door a crack, "My lady isn't decent yet. What is it?"

"Something is up," a voice said, "Your lady is in trouble. I thought you should know."

Amy nodded, "Do you know what or why?"

"No, that's the whisper from Mildred. She's been cackling about it all morning."

"Thank you, Helen," Amy said, "I will tell my lady."

Amy closed the door and turned back to me.

"Your mother's personal maid says that you are in trouble."

I turned back and began making my bed. "Remember yesterday?" The sheets weren't fitted, and I wasn't sure how to put them back together. I stared at the exploded corner in confusion.

“Wait, Ren. No, that’s my job.” Amy said, stepping in front of me. “We don’t use the same sheets two days in a row. I strip the sheets and send them down to the laundry.”

I winced, “I had no idea.”

“How would you? We live in completely different worlds.”

“But it’s my room. I should have noticed.” I said.

“Ren,” Amy said, her voice softening, “Your parents raised you like this. Servants have always been in the background of your life. Why would you notice them, unless something had gone wrong?”

But that was the problem. Lady Karen had grown up like Amy said, but Ren Watkins hadn’t. I had been making my own bed and doing laundry my whole life. I felt awful.

“When did you decide to make your own bed?” Amy asked.

“Yesterday, after we- you know. You had to make the bed a second time because of us. And I realized the power imbalance in our relationship. And I wanted to do something about it.”

I looked at the floor.

Amy put an arm around my waist, “I’m a maid. This is what I do. I’m employed by your uncle, not you.”

“I’m still a member of the family. I’m the one you interact with all day. And let’s be honest, they weren’t friendly interactions.”

Amy squeezed, “Not before, but recently things have been improving.”

I sighed, and then smiled, “Okay, there is that. But I still don’t like the power imbalance.”

Amy sighed, “Well until you’re head of House Octavian, you can’t induct me into the nobility.”

“I’m never going to be head of House Octavian. Carolynn is the eldest child of the Baron. She’ll inherit next. If something happens to her, my father will inherit. Then my older sister Catherine. Then my older sister Katarina.”

Amy nodded. “Then unless you plan to disinherit yourself, we’re stuck. We will be dealing with that imbalance for the immediate future.”

I needed to do something for her then. I couldn’t correct the imbalance. But I could make some gesture. She wouldn’t let me make the bed, but I could spend time and effort on her behalf in some other way. What did I know how to do that Lady Karen might know how to do? Something where I would have access to the materials. I saw a basket with what looked like sewing supplies. It sat in a corner against a wardrobe. I walked over and examined it. The basket contained fabric and string. It was full of half-finished embroidery pieces. It also had more than enough equipment to continue embroidering. I could embroider. I wasn’t a master at it. But I could embroider. I looked back at Amy. She was watching me. I noticed a small silver pin on her lapel in the shape of an English Ivy leaf. I could work with that. A little gesture, a little gift from a lover.

Somebody knocked on my bedroom door. A moment later I heard Manfred’s voice, “Lady Ka- Lady Ren? Are you awake? You have slept late and your father has demanded your presence.

“Oh crap. There it is.” I said. And then louder, I answered, “Thank you Manfred. I am awake and will be down once I’ve dressed. Where did father want to meet me?”

“Very good lady, I will tell your father. When ready, you may meet him in the drawing room.”

I knew my father would chew me out. Both Giles and Jean Octavian were angry violent men. But that didn’t matter. I just needed to get through the lecture and whatever else and then deliver the apology. I hated the idea of apologizing. I hated the idea of delivering Lynn’s acceptance of Wulfic’s proposal even more. But I needed Lynn to trust me. In order to marry anyone else, the heroine had to kill Prince Wulfric. I didn’t think I could convince Lynn to do that unless I had her full trust again. So I would apologize. And I would endure a lecture and dressing down from my new father. I just needed to keep my eyes on the prize.

Amy helped me dress in a kelly green pleated maxi skirt. It was late autumn. So I also wore a yellow silk and wool dolman mantle. And under that I wore a pumpkin orange scoop necked, lantern sleeve blouse. I would be walking to the Hyperborean

embassy, so I selected a black pair of Pinet Heeled Victorian boots. I added a gold rose shaped locket. Inside the locket was a lock of hair. I didn't know the story behind that ring. It wasn't relevant in the game. Once I had dressed, I walked to the drawing room.

I knocked on the door and then entered the room and stopped short. My father was not alone. There were four people in the room. Lord Jean Octavian, my father. Lady Evelyn Octavian, my mother, sat beside him. My uncle, Baron Giles Octavian stood behind my mother and father. Seated beside my mother was my aunt, Lady Theresa Octavian. I marveled at the ease with which I was thinking of these people as my family. My family from my past life was long gone. But I couldn't think of Jean Octavian as an upgrade despite this.

My real dad used to hit my mom. She'd use foundation and concealer to hide bruises rather than blemishes. And I'd killed her. Not myself, no dagger in the back. But I'd caused her death, caused it because I had been selfish. So I'd decided that was never happening again. Dad was gone. Mom was dead.

But I still had Lynn, and I was going to stand by her even if it destroyed me.

My father and uncle were both dressed in black tailcoats and black waistcoats. My aunt Theresa had dressed in an orange polonaise with a bustle. My mother wore a gray A-Line dress and a white mantle.

The designers had the drawing room walls decorated with period accurate wallpaper. The historical accuracy almost startled me. The background was cream. On that the artist had drawn a briar rose pattern in artichoke green and old rose pink.

I closed the door behind me and walked to stand in front of them. I wasn't looking forward to this. The rival's father doesn't show up in the game very often, but he was as nasty as his daughter.

"I am here father," I said, "You sent for me?"

My father frowned at me. Then he slapped his leg and stood up. "Is it true? Did you assault the crown prince of Hyperborea? I must say, I thought I raised a more intelligent daughter. When did you become so incompetent? You struck the crown prince of a rival nation? And now his marriage to Carolynn hangs by a thread."

He stepped away from his chair and began walking in a circle around me. I maintained eye contact with Aunt Theresa.

"I screwed up this one by letting my emotions get away from me," I answered. "But what do you mean by her marriage to Prince Wulfric? There was no guarantee she would pick the prince."

Father smacked the back of my head, as he continued to circle. My head jolted forward. I winced, but stopped myself from crying out. That had hurt. I didn't rub the back of my head though. No point in giving him the satisfaction of seeing that his blow had affected me.

"There was no other option." my father said, "What child of a baron would refuse the hand of a crown prince? He is the only option."

Giles nodded and said, "We had to be sure to include other suitors for the sake of decorum. But of course my daughter was always going to pick Prince Wulfric."

Aunt Theresa shook her head, "You may think it is a settled issue. But Evelyn and I do not agree. Wulfric is dangerous as a husband and an unacceptable risk for our daughter. We need somebody more reliable, and somebody who can make her happy."

My mother nodded, "Countess Myrddhin, for example, would be an excellent choice. She is a competent administrator and a skilled monster hunter."

Theresa shook her head, "The Countess Fiona would be an acceptable choice. But Duke Leon is a much better conversationalist and masterful naval commander. The Countess administers her county and our largest port. But Duke Leon administrates the very duchy where we live. Finally, the Countess Fiona is straight, and you are asking her to marry another woman."

I smiled at the description of Leon as a conversationalist. I remembered how he stumbled over his words when trying to talk with Lynn. That said, it was charming in an endearing and awkward way.

Evelyn shrugged, "What does her being straight matter? That's what pretty young lords are for after all."

Jean frowned, "Nonetheless, Carolynn will marry Prince Wulfric."

I coughed, and the four looked back at me, "I'm sorry everyone. I know I've caused problems by acting without restraint. Please accept my deepest apologies."

I waited for a response. None of them spoke. Instead they were all staring at me. Mother's mouth was hanging open. I huffed in frustration. More disbelief about the changes in Lady Karen's behavior.

"Karen dear," Aunt Theresa said, "Thank you. I am glad you appreciate the severity of the situation. And I accept your apology."

She paused, and then reached out and tapped my father's shin as he passed her. Then she added, "I am sure your father accepts your apology as well."

Father looked away. He clenched his fists, and I watched the knuckles turn white. And then he nodded and unclenched his hands. He turned back to face me.

"This apology, though unexpected, is acceptable. But I expect much better behavior in the future."

I smiled. Father might out rank Aunt Theresa, but she was the lady of the castle. "May I be excused? Lynn has asked me to deliver an apology to the Hyperborean embassy. She's also asked me to deliver her acceptance of his proposal."

My uncle smiled a toothy grin, "Excellent. Best get moving then. We need to repair your mess. And you doing the work is the least you can do."

I curtsied, and turned to leave. One confrontation down, now for the big one.

